



# TENNESSEE WOMEN VETERANS

Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs

## Commissioner's Note

July 2012



TDVA Commissioner  
Many-Bears Grinder

We are so excited to have our First Annual Women Veterans Summit under our belts and now we are quickly moving forward on our next event.

If you missed our inaugural event held in April, you missed some incredible milestone moments. Country music legend Lee Greenwood sang an emotional adaptation of "God Bless the USA" which recognized our women Veterans.

We also named our first Tennessee Woman Veteran of the Year, Mary Ross. Mary is the National Commander for the Women Veterans of America and served 20 years in the United States Army. Her continued commitment to Veterans is impressive and inspirational.

World War II United States Army Veteran Laura Rhodes was recognized as our oldest woman Veteran in attendance. Unfortunately, she passed away just a few weeks later.

Nearly 150 attendees heard from several prominent women who offered incredible guidance. Several vendors to include NAMI, OSDN and eBenefits assisted attendees with questions about federal benefits, employment opportunities, healthcare and other veteran resources.

Overall, this networking event was both educational and entertaining. To see videos, view pictures and to review the educational presentations, visit our website at [www.tn.gov/veteran/womensvets.shtml](http://www.tn.gov/veteran/womensvets.shtml).

We are looking forward to seeing this event grow as we prepare for the Second Annual Women Veterans Summit which will be a two day event, scheduled for April 13-14, 2013.

Hope to see you there.

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## Tennessee State Veterans' Homes Board Elects First Woman Chair

In June, the Tennessee State Veterans' Homes Board unanimously elected Mary Ross as the new Chairperson effective July 1. Ross is the first woman to be elected to the position which oversees three Tennessee State Veterans' Homes.

Ross began her military career in the United States Army in 1974. She served in Desert Shield and Desert Storm with the 2nd Brigade Task Force, 101st Airborne Division. Ross retired in July 1995 as a Sergeant First Class. Ross is currently the National Commander for Women Veterans of America and Deputy Executive Director for Operational Stand Down Nashville, Inc. which assists Veterans facing issues such as homelessness. She is also active in the Women Veterans Network, Tennessee Valley Health Care System, VFW, American Legion and has been a member of the Tennessee State Veterans' Homes Board since 2006. The accomplished Veteran has also been the TSVH Audit Committee Chair since 2006.



Mary Ross - first  
TSVH woman Chair

"Providing high quality health care for our Veterans is our commitment and we believe Mary's experience makes her a natural leader for the Tennessee State Veterans' Homes Board," Grinder said. We are confident Mary's vision and compassion for Veterans will continue to be incredible assets for the board and TSVH."

## Homeless Veterans in Tennessee

Homelessness, economic struggles and unemployment are escalating among America's Veterans. Numbers have grown through the past decade of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, but resources are still being developed to assist the growing need. The number of Women Veterans without permanent housing has doubled in the last few years and could continue to grow with the end of the Iraq War. Women make up about 12 percent of all Veterans in Tennessee. In 2011, Tennessee had 965 homeless Veterans, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness. Of those 965, 8 percent or 77 of were females.

Female service members dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) face unique challenges. Many have suffered from sexual assaults and continue to remain too traumatized to remain in common areas with men. Some are single mothers struggling to find employment and housing for their children.

To learn more about services for homeless Women Veterans visit [www.va.gov/HOMELESS/for\\_women\\_veterans.asp](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/for_women_veterans.asp).

## Women Veterans in the News

The number of women service members is on the rise, women in combat roles is increasing and the number of wounded women is also grabbing media attention.

The Huff Post World Internet Newspaper has posted an informative and in depth article regarding women service members titled. "[Unseen: Trailblazing Military Women Forced To Fight For Recognition, Equal Treatment](#)".

USA Today also ran an article earlier this year, "[Military to ease rules on women in combat](#)".

## 2012 Legislative Review



During this year's legislative session, TDVA followed more than 70 proposed bills with a focus on Veterans. These bills included highway sign dedications, joint resolutions to honor soldiers who passed away, specialty plates and improvements to the state's hiring process. The majority of the 70 bills passed legislation.

Among the new laws are a designated Tennessee National Guard Day, early registration for combat Veterans, and unemployment benefits for relocated military spouses.

For more information visit our State Benefits page at [tn.gov/veteran](http://tn.gov/veteran).

## VA Continually Addressing Healthcare Needs of Women Veterans



Did you know that women are the fastest growing group within the Veteran population? There are 23.4 million Veterans in the United States and approximately 1.8 million are women Veterans. They make up nearly 8 percent of the total Veterans population and nearly 5 percent of Veterans who use VA Healthcare.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) has been working hard over the last few years to focus on the healthcare needs of Women Veterans. In order to address the needs of women they have an expert panel of women Veterans or advisory committee to advise the USDVA on issues and programs affecting women Veterans. Six new members were appointed in December 2011. "The advisory committee on women Veterans significantly guides VA's efforts to identify and address ever changing needs of women Veterans," Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said.

The health care services available to women Veterans, including comprehensive primary care as well as specialty care such as reproductive services, rehabilitation, mental health, and treatment for military sexual trauma. In order for the VA to achieve the needs of the continually growing population of women Veterans they have implemented a women's clinic at every VA Hospital nationwide.

At each VA Medical Center, a Women Veterans Program Manager is designated to assist women Veterans. The Program Manager can help coordinate all patient services. Women Veterans interested in receiving care at the VA should contact their nearest VA Medical Center and ask for the Women Veterans Program Manager. To find out more, visit the USDVA website dedicated to Women Veterans Health Care ([www.womenshealth.va.gov](http://www.womenshealth.va.gov)).

### Maternity Care

While Tennessee VA Hospitals do not have an "in-house" obstetrical (OB) service they do provide OB care to eligible women Veterans through the Fee Basis Program.

Women Veterans select an Obstetrician and hospital or birthing center in their local area and VA pays the OB for the office visits, lab tests and ultrasounds. If a Veterans is seeing a specialist at a VA Women's Clinic before becoming pregnant, she may continue to see them during the pregnancy. In accordance with the Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, the VA now has authority to include limited newborn care. For more information visit [www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/services/.women.asp](http://www.tennesseevalley.va.gov/services/.women.asp).



## Getting to Know Your Commissioner

An unexpected phone call from Governor Bill Haslam took Tennessee Army National Guard Colonel Many-Bears Grinder off guard. She had served 35 years in the military and had her heart set on becoming a General. However, the opportunity to serve Tennessee Veterans from all branches changed her career path as she accepted the role as the first woman Commissioner for the Tennessee Department of Veterans Affairs in 2011.



Colonel Grinder was born in Utah; the youngest of five children. She remembers working for the Utah National Guard as a civilian when she was approached by one of the Generals at the National Guard. Her response, "the military is not ready for me." Fortunately, she would eventually change her mind.

Starting out as an enlisted soldier in 1975, retired Colonel Grinder set her sights on jobs not traditionally held by women. Serving as a Military Police Officer, Director of Logistics, Director of Personnel and Director of Property and Fiscal Operations, Commissioner Grinder pursued her Tennessee National Guard career with unwavering tenacity. When she asked to go to Afghanistan, her request was initially denied. However, Colonel Grinder was determined to deploy.



"I couldn't keep sending soldiers to the Middle East without walking in their boots," Commissioner Grinder said. "The 2007-2008 experience remains a part of me."

In 1995, Commissioner Grinder married Ernie Grinder and became step-mother to Adam and Sam. During her time in the Guard, a young soldier named Billie Jean worked for Colonel Grinder. The two female soldiers assisted with TN National Guard casualties which was one of many duties that bonded them together. Billie Jean later became Sam

Grinder's wife, a step-mother to Megan and Makayla and Colonel Grinder's daughter-in-law.

February 21, 2010, CW2 Billie Jean Grinder was killed in a helicopter crash in Iraq. Although the tragedy remains a heavy hearted event in the Grinder family, the TDVA Commissioner believes Billie Jean's death has helped her entire family to become more aware and effective in serving the survivors of fallen heroes.

"We don't have control of everything that happens in our lives, but we can choose how we respond to the great events and the crises that make us who we are," Grinder said.

## Remembering A Fallen Tennessee Hero



It took a thousand stitches to sew together the Tennessee Federation of Republican Women's (TFRW) Purple Heart Quilt presented to the Davenport and Grinder family on behalf of CW2 Billie Jean Grinder. The hand-made tribute was presented at the TFRW Day on the Hill in the House Chambers in March, 2012.

For more pictures visit our [facebook/myTDVA](https://www.facebook.com/myTDVA).



## Women Veterans Summit 2013



*Save The Date*

## Second Annual *Women* Veterans Summit 2013

April 13-14, 2013  
Radisson Hotel  
at the Opryland  
2401 Music Valley Drive  
Nashville, TN 37214

Registration begins on January 3, 2013

### History Making Women Veterans

Originally born in Wisconsin on May 4, 1920, Floetta Marie Brown Barton eventually called Tennessee home. Floetta enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 1943 and served until 1945. [The Library of Congress](#) records show Floetta went through basic training at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and was later stationed at Quantico Virginia. Staff Sergeant Barton's job in the Women Marines during World War I was to schedule entertainment for troops and keep morale high.



### Contact Us



We want to hear from you. Share your ideas, stories, concerns with us as we work to keep you informed about issues that concern our Tennessee Women Veterans.

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